



American Journal of Development Studies (AJDS)

ISSN: 2837-6676 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 2 (2026)

PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Law, Corruption, and Economic Governance: A Political Economy Perspective on Institutional Failure in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

TATTV Bem Elijah¹*, Mohammed Ndarani Mohammed², Akpaasou Daniel Terver²

Article Information

Received: June 27, 2026

Accepted: September 05, 2026

Published: October 17, 2026

Keywords

Corruption, Economic Governance, Institutional Failure, Law, Political Economy

ABSTRACT

Corruption is a serious impediment to effective economic governance in Nigeria and an obstacle to sustainable development. Notwithstanding the return to democratic rule in 1999 and the establishment of a multitude of legal and institutional frameworks aimed at tackling corruption, considerable governance deficits, weak public institutions, and poor socio-economic outcomes continue to plague the country. From a political economy perspective, this paper examines law, corruption, and economic governance and its impact on institutional failure in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper contends that notwithstanding the existence of a wide range of legal and regulatory framework against corruption in Nigeria, the effectiveness of these laws has been undermined by political interference, elite capture, weak enforcement and entrenched patronage networks. Using the lens of political economy theory, a paper examines the relationship between political power and economic interest and how their interaction leads institutional behavior and gets anti-corruption measures implemented. The study employs a qualitative research design that uses documentary analysis of academic literature, government reports, legal documents and publications of international organizations. According to findings corruption has a large impact on distorting public finance management, weakening infrastructure development, erasing domestic and foreign investment, and undermining public service delivery. Moreover, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) enjoy limited success due to selective enforcement as well as a lack of institutional autonomy. The paper ends by asserting that Nigeria's institutional failure is not just the absence of laws but the political and economic structures itself that sustain corruption. Key recommendations to improve the economic governance structures and systems towards achieving sustainable development include: strengthening the independence of institutions, implementing judicial reforms and establishing transparency mechanisms and citizen participation.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between law, corruption, and economic governance has become one of the most enduring concerns in contemporary political economy, governance, and development studies. Across many developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, corruption continues to undermine institutional effectiveness, weaken democratic governance, discourage investment, and constrain sustainable economic development. Although governments have introduced numerous legal and institutional reforms intended to strengthen accountability, transparency, and the rule of law, corruption remains deeply embedded within public institutions in many contexts. This apparent contradiction has generated significant scholarly interest regarding why comprehensive legal reforms frequently fail to produce meaningful improvements in governance outcomes.

Traditional approaches have often conceptualized corruption as an individual or administrative problem that can be addressed primarily through stronger laws, stricter enforcement, and institutional oversight. However, contemporary political economy scholarship

increasingly argues that corruption should be understood as a systemic feature of institutional arrangements that shape political incentives, economic interests, and access to state resources. From this perspective, corruption is not simply the consequence of weak legal frameworks or unethical behavior but reflects broader configurations of power, patronage, rent distribution, and elite bargaining that influence how public institutions operate (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; North *et al.*, 2009; Khan, 2006). Consequently, understanding institutional failure requires moving beyond purely legal explanations to examine the political and economic structures within which laws are formulated, implemented, and enforced.

Nigeria presents an important case for examining these dynamics. As Africa's largest economy by GDP and one of the continent's most populous democracies, Nigeria occupies a strategically significant position in regional political and economic development. Since the restoration of democratic governance in 1999, successive governments have undertaken extensive institutional reforms aimed at strengthening accountability, improving public financial management, and combating

¹ Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria

² Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, Maryam Abacha American University of Niger Maradi, Niger Republic

* Corresponding author's e-mail: tbelijah@fudutsinma.edu.ng

corruption. These reforms include the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003, the enactment of various anti-corruption laws, and the introduction of public sector reforms intended to improve transparency and governance (Ribadu, 2006). Collectively, these initiatives were expected to strengthen the rule of law, improve public resource management, enhance investor confidence, and promote inclusive national development.

Despite these substantial legal and institutional interventions, corruption remains pervasive across Nigeria's political and economic systems. International assessments consistently identify corruption as a significant obstacle to effective governance, economic competitiveness, public sector performance, and sustainable development (Transparency International, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Corruption manifests through bribery, embezzlement, procurement fraud, contract inflation, political patronage, nepotism, electoral malpractice, illicit financial flows, and the diversion of public resources for private gain. These practices weaken state institutions, distort policy implementation, reduce public trust in government, discourage domestic and foreign investment, and divert scarce resources away from education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction. The persistence of these governance failures despite extensive legislative reforms raises fundamental questions about the effectiveness of legal institutions and the structural conditions within which they operate.

More than two decades into Nigeria's Fourth Republic, concerns regarding fiscal accountability, infrastructure deficits, declining public service delivery, weak regulatory capacity, and limited institutional credibility continue to dominate national policy debates. Public confidence in anti-corruption institutions remains uneven, while governance challenges continue to constrain economic diversification, private-sector development, and inclusive growth. These persistent shortcomings suggest that institutional failure cannot be explained solely by deficiencies in legislation or administrative capacity. Rather, they point to deeper structural relationships between political power, economic interests, and institutional incentives that shape both the implementation and outcomes of anti-corruption reforms.

Although an extensive body of scholarship has examined corruption in Nigeria from legal, institutional, public administration, and governance perspectives, comparatively fewer studies have integrated these dimensions within a comprehensive political economy framework that explains how law, political incentives, and economic interests interact to produce persistent institutional failure. Existing research has frequently evaluated anti-corruption agencies, legal reforms, or governance indicators independently, often paying limited attention to the structural political and economic

conditions that undermine the effectiveness of formal institutions. Consequently, important questions remain regarding why successive legal reforms have generated only modest improvements in governance despite the establishment of multiple anti-corruption agencies, comprehensive legislative frameworks, and repeated institutional restructuring. This study addresses this gap by developing an integrated political economy analysis of the relationship between law, corruption, and economic governance during Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The study is anchored in the Political Economy Approach, which emphasizes the interaction between political authority, economic interests, institutional arrangements, and the distribution of public resources in shaping governance outcomes. Rather than treating law as an autonomous mechanism capable of constraining corruption, this perspective recognizes that legal institutions operate within broader systems of political competition, elite bargaining, patronage networks, and rent allocation (Khan, 2006; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Political actors may therefore manipulate public institutions to consolidate power, distribute political patronage, and secure economic advantages, thereby weakening institutional autonomy and limiting the effectiveness of anti-corruption enforcement. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where competition over state resources especially petroleum revenues has historically shaped political behavior, public expenditure, institutional development, and governance outcomes (Watts, 2004).

Guided by this perspective, the study addresses three interrelated questions. First, how effective have Nigeria's anti-corruption laws and institutions been in promoting accountability and strengthening economic governance? Second, how has corruption affected public finance management, infrastructure development, investment promotion, and public service delivery during the Fourth Republic? Third, how do political and economic interests interact to undermine legal enforcement and contribute to persistent institutional failure? Addressing these questions provides a deeper understanding of the structural mechanisms through which corruption continues to shape governance performance in contemporary Nigeria. The principal contribution of this study lies in its integration of legal, governance, and political economy perspectives to explain institutional failure in Nigeria. Rather than focusing exclusively on deficiencies in legislation, administrative capacity, or institutional design, the analysis conceptualizes corruption as an outcome of broader political and economic structures that simultaneously enable and constrain the operation of legal institutions. In doing so, the study contributes not only to scholarship on Nigeria but also to wider comparative debates concerning governance, anti-corruption reform, institutional capacity, and state effectiveness in resource-rich developing countries. The Nigerian experience offers important lessons for understanding why anti-corruption reforms frequently produce limited outcomes despite

substantial legal and institutional investment across many countries in the Global South.

The paper argues that institutional failure in Nigeria is rooted not merely in weak enforcement mechanisms but in deeper political economy dynamics characterized by elite capture, patronage politics, rent-seeking behavior, regulatory manipulation, and the strategic use of public institutions for private and political advantage. Understanding these structural dynamics is essential for designing reforms capable of strengthening institutional accountability, improving economic governance, reinforcing the rule of law, and promoting sustainable national development.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on law, corruption, economic governance, and institutional failure, followed by the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis. The subsequent sections outline the research methodology, examine the interaction between legal institutions, corruption, and economic governance during Nigeria's Fourth Republic, discuss the findings within a political economy perspective, and conclude by highlighting the study's theoretical contributions, policy implications, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

For some time now, law, corruption and economic governance have been the object of interest of scholarly works in the fields of political science, economics, public administration, legal studies and development studies. The researchers and authors focused on the findings of political and economic integration that generated these benefits mainly for the social groups who had been socially deprived for a long time. Currently, many developing countries experience a plethora of governance challenges. These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that legal reforms, on their own, are rarely sufficient to achieve accountability and institutional effectiveness. If political incentives are not aligned and the implementation of formal rules is undermined by economic interests and informal institutions, reform will fail. In consequence, it is an interdisciplinary perspective that fuses legal analysis with political economy and governance scholarship that is necessary to understand institutional failure.

With the growing emphasis on governance in development, there has been a shift in scholarly attention from law-making to the efficacy of agencies implementing the law. Historically, the modernization theories assumed that economic development would lead to stronger law institutions and less corruption. Yet, other research has shown that legal institutions are determined not just by law, but political settlement, state capacity, elite incentive and economic endowment (North, 1990; Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Such views have fundamentally transformed the governance debate by stressing that institutions operate amid wider political and economic settings that may either bolster or undermine

accountability.

Nigeria is a significant empirical case within this wider debate. Since 1999, when Nigeria reverted to democratic rule, successive administrations have continually enacted anti-corruption laws, set up specialized law enforcement agencies, and tried, through public sector reforms, to improve governance and foster development. Even this corruption, public institutions suffer from serious governance failures, and economic performance has often been below the country's significant development potential. The apparent contradiction raises fundamental questions regarding the linkages among legal institutions, political power, corruption and economic governance.

Existing scholarship sheds light on various facets of these relationships. Constitutional reforms and anti-corruption legislation have been examined by legal scholars; economists have looked at the impact of corruption on growth and investment; political scientists have studied patronage politics and elite behavior; and public administration scholars have analyzed institutional performance and governance reforms. Despite this literature, we still have a fragmented understanding of the legal, institutional and political economy, and the ensuing comprehension of institutional failure. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, crucial questions arise as to why far-reaching legal reforms have produced limited improvements in governance outcomes.

This literature review investigates scholarly works on law, corruption, economic governance, and institutional failure and relevant theoretical and empirical disputes. Reflections of Nigeria must be considered throughout this investigation. The study did well not to present the above phenomena in isolation. It shows how these concepts intersect within wider political-economic structures to shape governance outcomes. According to the review, the current study will aim to address the major gaps in the existing literature.

Concept of Law and the Rule of Law

Law is one of the most basic institutions by which societies regulate political power, organize economic activity, settle disputes and maintain social order. Law is defined by the social theorists of law, political economist and institutional economist as a set of formal norms or an apparatus of formal rules laid down by recognized authority to govern social behavior and to regulate the relations between the individuals or groups, the individuals or groups with other organizations and between the individuals or groups and the state. In addition to its function of coercion, law is an institution that shapes expectations, diminishes uncertainty, protects rights, and makes exchange easier. As a result, the effectiveness of legal institutions has featured prominently in debates on governance, institutional development, and state capacity. Hart (1961) formulated law as a mix of primary and secondary rules and this has been one of the most influential legal theories. The primary rules govern the conduct of individuals by laying down obligations and

prohibitions. The secondary rules suggest the method of creating, interpreting, revising, and enforcing the primary rules. Hart's analytical framework differed from earlier command theories of law in that it emphasized that the effectiveness of a legal system is achieved not just by the imposition of coercive sanctions, but by the institutional legitimacy, procedural certainty, and social acceptance of law within the community. His work remains to offer an essential conceptual basis for understanding the functioning of legal systems in modern states.

In governance literature, the final addendum to Hart's speaking of the institutional dimension and the classical doctrine of the rule of law (Dicey 1885) continues to remain one of the most influential normative principles. Dicey viewed the rule of law as the supremacy of law, equality before the law and the rights of the individual. In other words, the law is above any individual, including the government. The principles were created in the context of 19th century constitutional governance. But today, they still inform our understanding of democratic accountability, constitutionalism, and judicial independence. International organizations increasingly view the rule of law as a prerequisite for governance, development, and investment because a predictable legal system reduces uncertainty and restrict states' power to act arbitrarily.

Scholars today expand these classical definitions, emphasizing that the rule of law is more than simply the existence of rules. It means the effectiveness, impartiality, accessibility, and consistent enforcement of legal institutions. According to Fukuyama (2014), modern governance doesn't only depend on capable states but also on strong legal institutions that can constrain political power through neutral administration. In a similar vein, institutional economists maintain that legal systems reduce transaction costs, protect property rights, regulate the timing and scale of investment, and support long-term economic growth (North, 1990; Rodrik, 2007). The rule of law is thus a legal principle and an economic institution that support market development and public accountability.

Many agree on the importance of legal institutions, but scholars often question whether legal reform on its own can produce meaningful governance. Formerly, governance reforms often assumed that bolstering constitutions, creating anti-corruption outfits and enacting all-encompassing legislation would improve institutions' performance. Nonetheless, legal reform effectiveness varies depending on the political institutional context. Martin (2011) impact comparative study many developing countries on legal reform shows that the effects of legal reform are generally dependent on the political institutional context. When enforcement institutions lack certain qualities, laws will be officially in place but ineffective in practice. The qualities include autonomy, political support, administrative capacity and public legitimacy. As a result, it has become central to contemporary governance research to understand the

distinction between de jure institutions and de facto institutional performance.

Political economy scholarship offers an important explanation for this implementation gap. According to scholars of political economy, it is not that law is an independent institution which can put a constraint on political behavior but the legal institutions itself are embedded within the power and economic structures. According to Khan (2006), formal legal institutions often run along informal patronage networks that dictate how policy is implemented, resources are allocated, and institutions behave. The efficient functioning of these legal institutions fundamentally relies on the extractive or inclusive nature of those political institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Inclusive political institutions enforce laws impartially and hold public officials accountable to all citizens, while extractive institutions enable elites to manipulate laws and legal systems. As a result, similar laws can produce very different governance outcomes depending on the political incentives behind institutional behaviors.

Such argument is particularly applicable to a number of resource-dependent developing countries which experience legal institutions operating in elite competition, clientelism and political patronage environments. The selective enforcement of laws often encoded in such contexts reveals political calculations rather than legal reasoning. This undermines institutional legitimacy and weakens public confidence in governance. Legal institutions cannot be comprehended independently of, or in abstraction from, the political and economic structures which influence them.

Nigeria exemplifies this institutional contradiction. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, a barrage of laws has been enacted in the country meant to enhance transparency, accountability, and integrity in the public sector. Important legislative tools are the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999); Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000); Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act (2004); Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007); Public Procurement Act (2007) and many financial accountability regulations on public administration. Combined, these reforms hoped to enhance fiscal discipline, strengthen the enforcement of anti-corruption laws, public procurement and the rule of law.

Several empirical studies have shown that having a good body of law has not led to improvements in governance outcomes. Selective prosecution, delayed justice, regulatory capture, political interference, procurement irregularities, and inconsistent enforcement remain persistent issues undermining institutional credibility. (20 Words) These weaknesses indicate that Nigeria's biggest problem is not a lack of laws but inadequate capacities and political independence of institutions charged with implementing the law. In this vein, the Nigerian experience reinforces broader political economy arguments that effective governance depends not simply upon legal reform but

rather the interaction between law, institutional capacity, political incentives, and economic power.

The literature taken together proves that law has an important role in the sphere of democratic governance and economic development. However, the effectiveness of law is dependent on the wider institutional environment. Legal institutions cannot function without political power, administrative capacity and social norms. As a consequence, it helps to recognize that corruption and institutional failure can be explained not in purely legal but in political economy terms. This helps to understand how formal legal institutions interact with informal political incentives and economic interests.

This conception provides the theoretical foundation for the subsequent discussions on corruption, economic governance, and institutional failure in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Political Economy Approach which refers to an interdisciplinary field of study which views political authority, economic interest, institutional arrangement and process along with the distribution of resources as actors that shape the rules of the game (governing outcome). In contrast to explanations of corruption that focus on individual behavior, administrative ineffectiveness, or legal insufficiency, the political economy emphasizes the structural relationships between power, institutions and incentives that underlie patterns of governance. The framework fits well for this study as and provides an all-encompassing reason for corruption in spite of overhauling legislation and anti-corruption institutional failures at attaining particularly relevant results in achieving objectives of 'anti-corruption instruments.

The study of political economy originated as a classical investigation of the relationship between the state and the economy. Since then, the term has evolved into a broader analytical framework that looks at how institutions affect economic outcomes – and how economic developments affect institutional change, as well. Political economists, such as Marx, determined that economic structures, such as classes, play a crucial role in shaping political institutions. Similarly, Weber pointed out that authority and legitimate domination play a key role in bureaucracies. Modern political economy has elaborated on these insights by mapping how institutional arrangements, political incentives and elite bargaining shape governance performance, state capacity and economic development. Institutional political economy in particular argues that formal institutions cannot be understood separately from the informal political and economic relationships impacting the functioning of these institutions. (North, 1990; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2014).

Political economy within governance studies contests a rationality assumption that enacting rules or creating institutions will improve accountability and enhance public sector performance. In its place, it suggests that

within wider arrangements of political rivalry, patronage, and resource disposal, institutions develop, which affect both the execution and impact of legal reforms. As a result, governance outcomes are shaped not only by institutional design but also by the incentives facing political actors, bureaucratic elites, and economic actors.

This view provides a significant contrast to several rival explanations of corruption. Principal-Agent Theory, for instance, focuses on information asymmetries and monitoring. They claim corruption can be reduced through oversight, sanctions and accountability measures. Rational Choice Theory analyses corruption as a rational decision making process whereby people weigh the expected benefits they can get from a corrupt act against its cost. While these viewpoints can inform us about how individuals make decisions and institutions answer for their conduct, they tend to assume that the state has the will as well as the way to implementation against corruption.

The Political Economy Approach deems these assumptions insufficient. To it, political leaders and ruling elites may benefit from corrupt systems themselves. As a result, they may have nothing to gain from reforms that threaten their powers and resources. As a result, corruption is considered an institutional equilibrium with a political and economic rationale rather than merely an administrative failure. The political economy approach is particularly well-suited to explain governance challenges in contexts in which corruption is deeply embedded in political institutions.

The Political Economy Approach is built on several central concepts that will guide this analysis.

Elite capture is the first. This refers to situations where resource allocation resulting from public institutions is manipulated by politically or economically powerful groups through policymaking processes. Institutional action reflects not public interest but the insistent actions of powerful actors to maintain political and economic power. When elite capture occurs, it weakens the autonomy of institutions, erodes accountability, and undermines the implementation of laws.

The concept of patron-client relationships is closely connected to clientelism. This refers to the exchange of political support in return for personal benefits. These may include appointments to office, state contracts, or preferential treatment in access to state resources. Patronage networks bolster political loyalty and weaken meritocracy, institutional impartiality, and public accountability. In several developing democracies, these informal ties often operate in conjunction with formal legal institutions presenting parallel systems of governance that impede the consistent application of the rule of law.

The concept of rent-seeking refers to the attempt to gain economic advantage through political means rather than through productivity. Rent-seeking takes place when businessmen use their resources to gain access to valuable public resources. Furthermore, it also provides regulatory

approval and government contracts. In resource-dependent economies, political actors compete for funds (rents) managed by the state. This rent-seeking becomes institutionalized, hindering productive investment and economic diversification.

A concept that is closely related to “rent-seeking” is “state capture”, which occurs when powerful private or political interests exert undue influence on the legislative, regulatory, and administrative institutions through which public policy is formulated. In other words, state capture involves benefiting certain special interests rather than the general public. The effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies, regulatory institutions and judicial processes may be undermined and their institutional legitimacy weakened, under conditions of state capture.

Scholars in the sphere of political economy argue that corruption frequently performs important political functions in existing governance systems. Powerful groups in developing countries rely on patronage networks for their influence. Among other things, patronage policies facilitate the strengthening of governing coalitions, implementing political rewards, and enhancing electoral support. Similarly, elite domination of public resources stabilizes and reinforces existing power structures and political dominance (Khan, 2006). As a result, anti-corruption reforms are resisted not because their legal instruments are weak, but because their successful implementation would affect the distribution of political and economic gains of powerful actors.

Nigeria’s Fourth Republic is the focus of these insights. Nigeria has made several reforms to its constitution, laws, and institutions during the period of the restoration of democracy in 1999, which was intended to strengthen accountability and improve economic governance. The establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Public Procurement Act and other accountability initiatives show significant strides towards institutional reform. Still, corruption is rampant, governance issues persist, and most public institutions are still relatively ineffective.

An analysis of the political economy reveals that such outcomes cannot be explained merely by flaws in the laws or institutional design. They instead manifest the interaction of formal legal institutions with informal political structures marked by elite competition, patronage politics, distribution of rents, and contests over public resources access. In Nigeria, the quest for control of the State has been intensified by dependence on receipts from petroleum. This has provided opportunities for rent-seeking, regulatory capture and political patronage which often undermines autonomy and weakens enforcement by legal institutions. As a result, the effectiveness of legal reforms may be undermined by the political environment within which they operate.

The Political Economy Approach thus serves as the main analytical lens through which this study will evaluate the

law-corruption-economic governance-institutional failure nexus. The analysis is guided by how the implementation of anti-corruption laws are influenced by political-incentives; how institutional performance is influenced by elite-interests; how public-resource allocation is defined by patronage-networks; and how all of these interact for economic-governance outcomes. The framework allows for the evaluation of corruption and weakening of governance in political and economic terms rather than only in legal terms (Niyonzima, E.; Bayu, E. K. 2023).

The limitations of Political Economy Approach High-level Conceptualization of Corruption and Institutional Failure (HCCIF) is not without drawbacks. Focusing on political and institutional structures, it may downplay the individual ethical behavior of the players, culture of the organization and characteristics of the leadership shaping the governance outcome. In the same manner, micro-level administrative processes through which corruption take place in particular institutions are not always captured by political economy. The Political Economy Approach is the most suitable analytical tool to be used in this study because the main aim of this study is to unpack the structural persistence of corruption and the relative ineffectiveness of legal reforms in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria (Omondi, S. D. A.; Wamalwa, F. K.; & Chepsiror, E. 2025).

In this way, the study understands institutional failure not as the result of deficient legislation, but rather as the outcome of long-standing processes involving political power, economic incentives, institutional setups, and governance. The Political Economy Approach thus provides a theoretical framework for understanding why extensive legal reform has brought limited gains to accountability and economic governance and why sustainable institutional reform requires shifting the political and economic incentive structures that sustain corruption.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design employing systematic document analysis and interpretive political economy inquiry to examine the relationship between law, corruption, economic governance, and institutional failure in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (1999–2025). Documentary research is particularly appropriate because the study investigates institutional processes, governance reforms, legal frameworks, and political dynamics that are extensively documented in legislation, policy reports, government publications, institutional records, and scholarly literature. Rather than generating primary data through surveys or interviews, the study seeks to synthesize and critically interpret existing evidence to explain why extensive legal reforms have produced only limited improvements in governance outcomes.

Document analysis is increasingly recognized as a rigorous qualitative research method capable of



Source: Developed by the author based on North (1990), Khan (2006), Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), and Fukuyama (2014).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

generating rich insights into public policy, governance, and institutional development. As Bowen (2009) argues, documentary analysis enables researchers to identify patterns, verify evidence across multiple sources, and construct comprehensive interpretations of complex social and political phenomena. Within governance and political economy research, documentary evidence is particularly valuable because it captures both the formal institutional architecture of governance and the broader policy environment within which institutions operate.

The research combines descriptive and analytical dimensions. The descriptive component identifies the principal legal frameworks, anti-corruption institutions, governance reforms, and accountability mechanisms established during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The analytical component examines how political incentives, elite interests, institutional arrangements, and economic structures influence the implementation of these reforms and shape governance outcomes. This integrated approach facilitates a systematic assessment of the gap between formal legal provisions (*de jure* institutions) and actual institutional performance (*de facto* governance).

Research Philosophy and Analytical Orientation

The study is situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, which assumes that governance outcomes are shaped by socially and politically constructed institutional processes rather than solely by measurable variables. From this perspective, corruption and institutional failure

are understood as complex phenomena embedded within historical, political, and economic contexts that require contextual interpretation rather than purely statistical explanation.

The analytical orientation is informed by the Political Economy Approach, which views governance as the product of interactions among political power, institutional incentives, and economic interests. Consequently, documentary evidence is interpreted not merely to describe legal reforms but to explain how elite interests, patronage networks, rent-seeking behavior, and institutional incentives influence the implementation and effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.

Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary documentary sources, selected to provide comprehensive evidence regarding corruption, governance reforms, legal institutions, and economic governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2025. Using multiple documentary sources enhances analytical depth while allowing triangulation across independent evidence.

The documentary sources include

- Peer-reviewed academic literature, including journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, doctoral dissertations, conference proceedings, and working papers addressing corruption, governance, institutional development, political economy, public administration,

and Nigerian politics.

- Government publications, including reports issued by the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Budget Office of the Federation, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation, and the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP). These publications provide official evidence on fiscal governance, public expenditure, procurement systems, and economic management.

- Legal and policy documents, including the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended), the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act (2004), the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007), the Public Procurement Act (2007), the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) Act (2007), and the Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act. These documents establish the legal and institutional framework governing anti-corruption and public accountability.

- Reports of international organizations, including publications produced by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Transparency International (TI), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These sources provide comparative governance indicators, corruption assessments, institutional evaluations, and economic performance data.

- Official publications of anti-corruption agencies, particularly annual reports, strategic plans, statistical bulletins, and policy documents issued by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), which provide evidence on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, asset recovery, institutional achievements, and operational challenges.

Document Identification and Selection Criteria

To enhance methodological transparency and reproducibility, documentary materials were identified through systematic searches of major academic databases, university library repositories, official government websites, institutional archives, and publications of international organizations. Electronic database searches included sources such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, HeinOnline, and SSRN.

Searches employed combinations of keywords including law, rule of law, corruption, economic governance, institutional failure, political economy, anti-corruption, Nigeria, Fourth Republic, elite capture, rent-seeking, governance reform, and public accountability.

Documents were included where they

- addressed corruption, governance, law, public

administration, political economy, or institutional performance;

- focused on Nigeria or offered relevant comparative theoretical perspectives;
- were published between 1999 and 2025, corresponding to Nigeria's Fourth Republic;
- originated from peer-reviewed academic sources or reputable governmental and international institutions; and
- provided empirical, conceptual, legal, or policy evidence relevant to the study objectives.

Documents were excluded if they consisted primarily of opinion pieces, unverified online content, anonymous publications, duplicated materials, or sources lacking sufficient academic or institutional credibility.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was undertaken through a systematic documentary review. Following identification, documents were screened for relevance, credibility, and alignment with the study objectives. Selected materials were read repeatedly to facilitate familiarization with their content before extraction of relevant information.

Information extracted from each document included legal provisions, institutional mandates, governance reforms, corruption patterns, policy implementation outcomes, public finance management practices, infrastructure development, investment governance, public service delivery, and institutional performance. The use of multiple documentary sources enabled comparison between official government narratives, independent international assessments, and academic interpretations, thereby strengthening analytical depth through triangulation.

Data Analysis

The study employed qualitative content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis as complementary analytical techniques.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to examine legal texts, policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly literature systematically. The analysis focused on identifying recurring concepts, institutional patterns, governance practices, and policy outcomes relating to corruption and economic governance.

Particular attention was given to

- anti-corruption legislation and institutional mandates;
- implementation of governance reforms;
- reported corruption cases and institutional responses;
- accountability mechanisms;
- public finance management;
- governance performance; and
- developmental consequences of institutional weaknesses.

This approach enabled systematic comparison between the intended objectives of legal reforms and their practical implementation.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The study further employed reflexive thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke. Analysis involved six iterative stages:

1. familiarization with documentary evidence;
2. generation of initial codes;
3. identification of recurring themes;
4. review and refinement of themes;
5. interpretation of relationships among themes; and
6. integration of findings within the Political Economy Approach.

The principal analytical themes included

- rule of law and anti-corruption legislation;
- institutional effectiveness;
- elite capture and patronage politics;
- rent-seeking and state capture;
- corruption and public finance;
- corruption and infrastructure development;
- corruption and investment governance;
- public service delivery; and
- institutional failure during Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The integration of content analysis and thematic analysis enabled both systematic description of documentary evidence and deeper interpretation of the structural relationships shaping governance outcomes.

Application of the Political Economy Framework

The Political Economy Approach was the main framework for analysis. Instead of assessing legal institutions in a vacuum, documentary evidence was analyzed in relation to broader political and economic structures affecting governance exercise.

The analysis investigated how exactly.

- Political elites influence anti-corruption institutions.
- There are networks that influence institutions
- Rent-seeking behavior influences distribution of public resources.
- State capture limits law enforcement ability.
- Incentives of institutions affect the outcome of governance.
- Political and economic interests ensure the continuity of institutional failure.

Using the approach of political economy granted the possibility for the study to go beyond mere description of corruption to explaining the structural mechanisms through which governance failures continue to persist. This all happens despite the numerous and extensive legal and institutional reforms.

Trustworthiness of the study

By employing qualitative criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, the study can enhance the quality and trustworthiness.

By comparison, evidence from academic literature, government publications, legal papers, institutional reports, and international governance assessments enhanced credibility through methodological

triangulation. The detailed, transparent, and systematic description of document selection, data collection, and analytical procedures enhanced dependability. Support confirmability through evidence that is documented as opposed to opinion and consistency with the theoretical framework of the study. This in-depth contextual description of the research would allow the readers to determine the applicability of the findings to governance in other developing democracies.

Ethical Consideration

The current study relied solely on publicly available documentary materials and consequently did not involve human participants, interviews, questionnaires or confidential institutional data. Therefore, participants were not exposed to any ethical risks. Nonetheless, the research complied with the standards of academic integrity through the accurate citation of its documentary sources, faithful account of its published evidence and careful acknowledgment of the intellectual property of others. To increase the validity of the inferences and minimize misinterpretation, the documentary material was objectively and critically interpreted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Anti-Corruption Institutions and the Performance

The efficacy of anti-corruption drives in Nigeria is contingent upon the capability, autonomy and efficiency of the institutions set up for the purpose. Following the commencement of the Fourth Republic, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) as well as the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) and Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) have all been set up.

The ICPC came alive in 2000 as an agency for the prosecution of corruption-related offenses in the public sector. Furthermore, the EFCC was created in 2003 to prosecute financial crimes such as money laundering, embezzlement, cybercrime, and advance fee fraud. The two institutions were able to make important strides, including the prosecution of elite public officials, asset recovery, anti-corruption initiatives, and institutional reforms.

Their overall display is mixed, despite their achievements. The credibility of institutions continues to be undermined by political interference as agencies involved in anti-corruption are accused of selectively targeting political opponents. They overlook those who are allies of the incumbent government. The political appointment and removal of agency heads raise concerns about institutional autonomy, as again the government will be politicising the services. Corruption cases face long delays due to procedural complications and repeated adjournments, which further hamper anti-corruption efforts of the judiciary. Institutional efficacy is also affected by limitations in funding, modern equipment,

and research ability.

Despite the existence of many anti-corruption agencies, corruption persists because having too many institutions doesn't guarantee accountability. To be more effective in fighting corruption, anti-corruption institutions must be genuinely independent, professionally competent, supported by the judiciary and underpinned by long-term political commitment.

Elite Holding Influence and Politics verging on Patronage

One of the major explanations for institutional failure in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is elite capture. Powerful political and powerful economic actors Hijack public institutions and public resources to the private benefit. Nigeria's politics is characterized by fierce competition among various political elites who seek access to state resources. In the quest for power, those in public office see it as a means of accessing wealth, and being able to distribute patronage.

Joseph's (1987) conception of prebendal politics is still relevant in this case. Public officials often regard state resources as perks that can be allocated to supporters, ethnic constituencies, political allies, and family networks. As a result, political considerations increasingly influence governance decisions than developmental concerns.

Undermine elite capture governance in various ways When meritocracy is influenced, it impact the public appointments based on political loyalty. It leads to policy distortion and corruption by creating an incentive for political actors to recoup their campaign costs and reward supporters. The oil industry has demonstrated a trend of subsidy fraud, contract inflation, oil bunkering and revenue misallocation, among other accusations.

Electoral corruption, such as vote-buying and improper financing of campaigns, is brought about by patronage politics. According to the perspective of political economy, corruption persists not because of the lack of laws but because it serves important functions within existing political arrangements. As a result, beneficiaries of the status quo often oppose anti-corruption reforms.

Corruption and Public Finance

Corruption greatly affects public finance managements in Nigeria. Maintaining effective fiscal governance would require transparency, accountability and following rules. Yet, elements of corruption enable loss of revenue through tax evasion, customs fraud, illicit financial flows and embezzlement.

Public investigations and audit reports regularly unearth unauthorized spending, questionable procurement, and irregular financial management within various government institutions. These practices undermine fiscal discipline and diminish funds for development expenditure. Corruption causes changes in budget means fund to spend on those projects from which rent extraction can occur.

The implementation of the budget suffers too. Over the years, project abandonment due to rampant inflation and

fraud in procurement have caused public spending not to achieve results. Inefficient use of resources and a strain on finances, as well as reduced ability of government to lessen poverty, unemployment and infrastructure deficit. These findings show that the reforms of the public finance must fix technical flaws as well as political incentives for corruption.

Corruption and Infrastructure Development

Economic growth, productivity and national competitiveness depend on infrastructure. Nonetheless, corruption has hampered the provision of infrastructure in Nigeria. The country continues to face major shortages in terms of transportation, electricity, water supply and other infrastructure despite heavy public investment since 1999.

Contract inflation remains one of the most widespread manifestations of corruption in infrastructure development. The price at which public contracts are awarded frequently exceeds the market rate, resulting in losses. The efficiency reducing procurement fraud and steering of bidding processes favour politically connected contractors. The abandonment of projects has been common, leading to wastage of resources and low impact. It is not only about the money. When roads, ports and air connections fail, new investment monitoring suffers unless resolved. Infrastructure projects are often not engines of growth but patronage distribution or rent-seeking devices from the political economy perspective.

Corruption and Investment Climate

Investment is indispensable for economic growth, job creation, and industrial development in our country. Nonetheless, corruption erodes the climate necessary to draw private and foreign investment. Thesis statement: Informal payments for licenses, permits, contracts and regulatory approvals are a common business necessity. Higher costs lower profit margins and deter investments. Corruption creates uncertainty because regulatory choices will depend more upon political influence than on visible rules. Investors generally prefer environments that are legally certain, policy consistent, and institutionally stable. Corruption levels of a country impact the inflow of foreign direct investment into the nation.

Corruption is one of the many concerns that continue affecting Nigeria's investment climate, as well as bureaucratic inefficiency, regulatory inconsistency, and weak enforcement. Corruption also spoils competition by allowing connected firms access to government contracts and regulatory advantages. Entrepreneurship undermined; economic diversification hampered; long-term growth impaired.

Corruption and Service Delivery

The deterioration of public service delivery is one of the most obvious outcomes of corruption. Administrative systems, effective governance, and citizen engagement are essential to deliver resources for the effective functioning of essential services. Corruption makes these services

less reliable and effective.

When we talk about education sector corruption, we are referring to payroll deception, inflation of contracts, examination malpractice, and diversion of educational funds. In healthcare too, procurement frauds, absenteeism, diversion of medical supplies and financial mismanagement of funds are affecting service quality. Beneficiaries' selection processes are manipulated and resources intended for vulnerable groups are diverted, thus undermining social protection programs.

Public complaints about lack of service delivery reflect the issues in our government. Corruption is therefore not just an economic issue but a direct window between social service and corruption further shows the impact of corruption on citizen's welfare.

Institutional Failure in the Fourth Republic

Nigeria's Fourth Republic suffered from institutional failure due to corruption, elite capture, weak accountability mechanisms, and governance shortcomings, all of which are cumulative. Many institutions are still facing difficulties in carrying out their functions notwithstanding the continuity of democracy and many reforms.

There is a total failure of institution which includes weaker enforcement of laws, political interferences in regulatory agencies, delay in judicial processes, and implementation failures of policies. Recurrent corruption scandals involving public officials have also caused a decline in public trust. Low levels of trust erode democratic legitimacy and reduce citizen participation.

The perspective of political economy suggests that institutional failure is often related to the power. Institutions may be weakened or captured to safeguard elite interests and maintain existing patterns of material inequality. Corruption and institutional weakness further strengthen each other in a vicious cycle. When institutions are weak, corruption happens. Corruption further erodes professionalism, accountability and public trust in institutions. The institutional failure in Nigeria cannot only be attributed to its administrative failures and legal inadequacies but also to its broader political and economic structures that facilitates corruption.

Recommendation

Corruption and weaknesses in economic governance are serious impediments to sustainable growth in Nigeria. As a response to this situation, there is the need for wider reforms that can target institutional weaknesses on the one hand and the political economy structures that sustain corruption on the other hand.

To begin with, anti-graft institutions like the EFCC, ICPC and CCB should be given more operational and financial autonomy. If the appointment of agency leadership is done via transparent and merit-based processes, it would enhance institutional independence and reduce political interference.

Secondly, reforming judiciaries are needed. The strengthening of specialized anti-corruption courts

should be undertaken to expedite resolution of cases, minimize delays and enhance public trust in the justice system.

The third measure is enhancing transparency and accountability in the management of public finance through the use of digital financial management systems, electronic procurement systems, open budgeting and increasing public access to government financial information.

We should strengthen procurement systems by empowering oversight institutions, mandating compliance with procurement regulations, and making contract information public.

The recruitment and promotion of staff on merit should become institutionalized across the public service. Public administration that is professional and competent will reduce corruption and enhance institutional performance. Social accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to increase civic engagement. We should ensure protection, encouragement, and participation of civil society organizations, media representatives, professional bodies and whistleblowers.

The seventh step is to strengthen political finance regulations to enhance transparency in campaign financing and reduce the impact of illicit funds on elections.

Eighth, economic diversification should be focused on to diminish reliance on petroleum revenues and limiting the opportunity for rent-seeking. Allocating resources towards farm, factory, IT, green technologies boosts wider economic opportunities.

The coordination of all the institutions working on anti-corruption i.e. anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement bodies, regulatory institutions need to be improvised for better sharing of information and implementation of those policies.

Lastly, governance enhancements need to tackle the political economy roots of corruption; patronage, elite capture and state capture. The long-term success of weak states entails strengthening democratic institutional frameworks, enhancing inclusiveness in political competition, and aligning political incentives with accountability, transparency and national development objectives.

CONCLUSION

Since the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has made remarkable efforts to enhance accountability and improve governance via reforms and institutions. Through the establishment of anti-corruption agencies, enactment of accountability laws and implementation of governance reforms, a formal commitment against corruption can be established. Nigeria's political and economic systems are nonetheless beset by corruption.

Corruption happens as a result of wider trends of institutional failure, the study finds. Nigeria has a comprehensive legal and institutional framework, but its implementation is often sporadic and politicized. The EFCC and the ICPC have recorded important successes,

but many challenges still relate to their autonomy, funding, political interference, and judicial inefficiency.

The study shows in addition that corruption is detrimental to economic governance because it complicates public finance management, slows down the development of infrastructure, discourages investment and reduces the quality of public service delivery. These effects lead to poverty, unemployment, inequality, and diminishing trust in public institutions.

The political economy approach offers a more profound explanation for these issues. Weak laws and bad apples are not the real drivers of corruption, but rather elite capture, patronage politics, rent-seeking and state capture systems. The incentives produced by these structures promote corruption and undermine institutions. As a result, meaningful reforms cannot be mere legal and administrative reform but must deal with the political and economic basis behind corruption. With the introduction of inclusive institutions for accountability, transparency and public enlightenment, sustainable development in Nigeria would be a reality.

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